

## **ELECTIONS AND LEGITIMACY IN AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EGYPT AND SUDAN**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Holding periodic democratic elections is one of the principal ingredients of liberal democracy. This practice has also been adopted by authoritarian regimes not for purposes of promoting democracy but to gather legitimacy support to stay in power as well as seeking acceptance in the eyes of both domestic and international communities. Based on dataset of elections in Muslim dominated countries, particularly Egypt and Sudan, respectively, the paper suggests that elections are a sufficient mechanism to mobilise support to keep authoritarian regimes in power. These Muslim countries have had periodic elections but little has been extended to other fundamental tenets of democracy such as freedom of speech, respect of human rights and freedom of press among others. Instead, leaders have used these elections as a license to market their position to hold onto power rather than allowing it to be a competitive game to cause change as people may wish. This study attempts a comparison between authoritarian elections in Sudan (1989-2011) and Egypt (1981-2011). The arguments and analysis given in this paper are based on presidential election dataset country profile of these two Muslim countries obtained from African elections database.

### **Introduction**

Holding periodic democratic elections is one of the principal ingredients of liberal democracy. This practice has also been adopted by authoritarian regimes not for purposes of promoting democracy but to gather aura of legitimacy support to be accepted in the eyes of both domestic and international communities to stay in power. The dataset of election results from Muslim dominated countries, particularly Egypt and Sudan, respectively, suggests that elections have been sufficient mechanisms to mobilise support to keep authoritarian regimes in power. These Muslim dominant countries for so many years have had periodic elections. Unquestionably, this is a positive and significant sign towards acceptable political system.

But little has been extended to other fundamental tenets of democracy such as freedom of speech, respect of human rights and freedom of press among others. Though the official position of government in these countries is considered as democratic republics, the democratic dispensation in Sudan for a long time has been put under question by both local and international communities. While that of Egypt received more resistance mainly from its citizens. This signifies that elections and political reforms are used to save the regime from being removed from power rather than promoting democracy.<sup>1</sup> Blaydes affirms that authoritarian regimes that hold elections including Egypt do not democratise at all, rather they do it simply to well-institutionalise their authoritarian regimes so that they can be accepted.<sup>2</sup>

It is argued that in Sudan since independence in 1956, elections have been designed to satisfy international opinion.<sup>3</sup> This implies that authoritarian leaders know it well that “elections are reliable vehicles, which can broaden and deepen citizens’ loyalty to build popular legitimacy for a successful political regime.”<sup>4</sup> This clearly shows that authoritarian leaders in these two Muslim countries understood the importance of elections in bringing about broad public confidence both at international and local levels to endorse their stay in power. To assess the validity of these predictions, this study relies mainly on these countries’ elections dataset profiles.

Therefore, the purpose and objectives of this paper is two-fold. First is to examine and analyse authoritarian democratic elections and their relationship to sustainability of authoritarian regime in power in these two countries. Second, is to show the limitations inherent in the democratic content of authoritarian elections. The questions to be considered are: Is there any linkage between elections and authoritarian’s long survival in power? Why do authoritarian leaders hold democratic elections? What are the limitations inherent in authoritarian elections? This paper attempts to answer these questions focusing on presidential elections in Egypt and Sudan under Hosni Mubarak and Omar Hassan al-Bashir,

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<sup>1</sup> Abd al-Ghaffar Shukur. “Political Parties in Egypt”. In Majed, Ziad. *Building Democracy in Egypt: Women’s Political Participation, Political Life and Democratic Elections*, Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy Anderson Electoral Assistance. 2005, 49

<sup>2</sup> Blaydes, Lisa. “Authoritarian Elections and Elite Management: Theory and Evidence from Egypt”. 2008. ([www.princeton~piirs/Dictatorships042508/Blaydes.pdf](http://www.princeton~piirs/Dictatorships042508/Blaydes.pdf) accessed on 24/10/2011).

<sup>3</sup> Willis, Justin and al-Battahani, Atta. “We Changed the Laws”: Electoral Practice and Malpractice in Sudan since 1953” *African Affairs*, Vol. 109, No. 435. 2010, (191-212).

<sup>4</sup> Lindber, I. Staffan. *The Power of Elections: Democratic Participation, Competition and Legitimacy in Africa*. Lund: Lund University. 2004, 4.

respectively. By providing answers to these questions the intent is to demonstrate and support theories which link elections to longevity of authoritarian regime in power. The central argument is that elections cannot only be regarded as a fundamental pillar in democratic system; it is also a useful credible practice in authoritarian regimes. It has served many authoritarian leaders to hold onto power. Thus, the answers to these question helps in understanding the power of elections to further authoritarian government. It should be noted, the choice to study these two countries is that these Muslim countries share in common authoritarian system, which have allowed holding of periodic elections. That is, the politics of these countries is marked by repeated effort to hold election in which incumbent authoritarian leaders always emerged winner with high percentages. Therefore, exploring a comparison of these cases makes this study an interesting and important one in contributing to the existing literature on comparative politics, particularly elections. The study covers presidential elections during Omar Al-Bashir and Hosni Mubarak's regime in Sudan and Egypt respectively. This study is structured in four parts. It commences with an introduction, which is preceded by a literature review of subject matter of the study. Part three covers the highlight of empirical arguments and finally the conclusion.

### **Studies on Authoritarian Regimes and Elections**

Election is one of the central elements which place the steering wheel in the hands of the people to elect or renew those leaders in power to form government to which they offer legitimacy. This has compelled both democratic and authoritarian regimes to consider elections as a crucial practice to legitimise them or their policies.<sup>5</sup> Election is defined by Abdul Rashid Moten and Islam as “an instrument through, which the electors exercise influence over public policies and repudiate those persons and policies electoral majorities no longer support”.<sup>6</sup> They also look at it as a “means to choose those who will guide and direct the affairs of the government”.<sup>7</sup> Within these definitions, Heywood puts that “elections helps directly or indirectly to determine who will hold government power”.<sup>8</sup> In the light of these definitions, elections play a significant role as a means to pursue or retain political power. Thus, it provides avenues for rectification and renewal in the political leadership of the country and guarantees the sovereignty of the people. In this way, an election becomes a

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<sup>55</sup> Abdul Rashid Moten, and Islam, Serajul Syed. *Introduction to Political Science, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, Singapore: Cengage Learning. 2009,326.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 326.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Heywood, Andrew. *Politics*. London: Macmillan. 1997, 222.

principal means through which authoritarian leaders and their political loyalties seek legitimacy. It also gives government prominence to endure its stability and continuity because they periodically engage citizens to endorse them.

In this regard, there are many paramount studies on elections in authoritarian regimes; which have explored the pivotal role elections play in building and facilitating the survival of these regimes. Many studies on elections and authoritarian regimes found that authoritarian leaders opt for elections not only as a source of legitimacy but also as a tactical move to perpetuate themselves in power.<sup>9</sup>They point out that elections by authoritarian regimes are merely a hive of sham events, which are intended to satisfy the domestic and international opinion.<sup>10</sup>The findings of these studies further indicate that the practices of electoral processes are dominated by intimidation of the people to turn out and vote for the regime. This way, many people vote not to choose leaders of their choice but out of fear of consequences if they do not vote the regime. Arguably, this gives the regime an opportunity to gain monopoly and win the election to renew their survival and stay in power.

Another study by Magaloni, which examined hegemonic party survival and its demise in Mexico, found that elections were instrumental in helping authoritarian leaders to reduce the influence of the oppositions in gaining access to political power.<sup>11</sup>He also mentions that elections were credible tools to keep the opposition divided and to create “loyal opposition” by facilitating them to actively participate in elections or enticing them to join the regime.<sup>12</sup>For example, in the 2000 election in Egypt out of 72 members of the National Assembly who had been elected on independent ticket many joined the ruling NDP party.<sup>13</sup>This made the loyalist number to increase from 353 to 388. This is particularly so especially when the government in power realises that opposition has a potential threat to boycott the election with the view of making the regime lose credibility both domestically and internationally. Also, when the opposition makes it clear that it is out to take power, the incumbent, will be there to ensure it averts that move by the opposition. This political

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<sup>9</sup>See, Willis, Justin and al-Battahani, Atta. “We Changed the Laws”: Electoral Practice and Malpractice in Sudan since 1953” *African Affairs*, Vol. 109, No. 435. 2010, (191-212); Przewoski, Adam. “Constraints and Choices: Electoral participation in Historical Perspective”. *Comparative Political Studies* Vol. 42, No. 1. 2009, (4-30)

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Magaloni, Beatriz. *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and its Demise in Mexico*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2006.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>IPU: Inter-parliamentary Union ([www.ipu.org/parline/reports/2097\\_E.htm](http://www.ipu.org/parline/reports/2097_E.htm))

behaviour features greatly in autocratic governments and they cannot willingly allow democracy to take roots because it would threaten its survival in power.

When Blaydes investigated the aspect linking elections to authoritarianism in Egypt, he found that elections were pertinent in serving as the regime's safest instrument to distribute rents and promotions among the most influential groups.<sup>14</sup> He argued that using elections, authoritarian regimes are able to recruit elites who would pose as a threat to the regime to serve it and are rewarded handsomely. This helps the regime to build the regime's leadership cadres who are reliable in supporting and propagating good ideas of the regime to influence its continuity in power. This makes both international and domestic community never to raise serious threat against the authoritarian regimes clinging onto power. In another study Magaloni adds that authoritarian government exercises a lot of control over mass media, which enables the regime to create "misrepresented balance of forces, thwart the propagation of accusations of electoral corruption".<sup>15</sup> He also mentions that even electoral rules in most cases are biased in favour of the autocratic regime. Therefore, the purpose of elections in this context was to win and maintain the loyalty of the masses to accept the regime. Within this context, the government ensures that elections are held but at the same time makes sure that the opposition together with the people are crippled in a way that they cannot change the government through popular political participation but rather the process is used as a tool to legitimise its authority.<sup>16</sup>

Cox, in his work also found similar findings that authoritarian regime hold elections basically for two reasons. One is to pursue "the goal of staying in power as much as possible" and two, to guard against being removed from power forcefully.<sup>17</sup> Cox in the same study further reveals that authoritarian commitment to elections may help it to decrease the possibility of the opposition plotting a coup just before or immediately after elections even if these elections are contested.<sup>18</sup> He emphasised that when the authoritarian leader wins an election, it signifies some substantial level of popular support by the citizens. Schedler outlines in his work some

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<sup>14</sup>Blaydes, Lisa. "Authoritarian Elections and Elite Management: Theory and Evidence from Egypt". 2008. ([www.princeton-piirs/Dictatorships042508/Blaydes.pdf](http://www.princeton-piirs/Dictatorships042508/Blaydes.pdf), accessed on 24/10/2011).

<sup>15</sup>Magaloni, Beatriz. "The Game of Electoral Fraud and the Ousting of Authoritarian Rule". *American Journal of Political Science*. 2010. ([www.stanford.edu/group/polisci/faculty/magaloni/magfraudeajps1209-1.pdf](http://www.stanford.edu/group/polisci/faculty/magaloni/magfraudeajps1209-1.pdf)) accessed on 24/10/2011.

<sup>16</sup>Dickerson, O. Mark, Flanagan, Thomas and O'Neill, Brenda. *An Introduction to Government and Politics: A Conceptual approach 8th Edition*. Canada: Cengage Learning. 2009, 291.

<sup>17</sup>Cox, W. Gary. "Authoritarian Elections and Leadership Succession, 1975-2000". 2007. ([http://bcep.haas.berkeley.edu/papers/cox\\_20071119.pdf](http://bcep.haas.berkeley.edu/papers/cox_20071119.pdf)) accessed on 31/10/2011.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

ways, which aid authoritarian regimes to manipulate to win an election to include strong hold on controlling the mass media, election rigging, manipulation of election rules and procedures.<sup>19</sup> Schedler argues that in this way, authoritarian leaders are able to hide their realities and guard against any eventuality that may arise to threaten their power.<sup>20</sup> Greene concludes that in most cases, this is enabled by the regime's monopoly over resources to facilitate its activities together with its policy appeals and patronage goods, which biases electorates in its favour.<sup>21</sup> He adds that these regimes are good at perpetuating "physical intimidation, beating or even killing of opposition to reduce rising formidable force that can defeat them in elections."<sup>22</sup> Levitsky and Way also highlight same findings that "government critics suffer harassment, arrest and in some cases violent attacks, and electoral fraud, unfair media access and abuse of state resources skewed the playing field heavily in favour of incumbent".<sup>23</sup> These practices limit the opposition from penetrating the masses to gather support. A study by Brownlee revealed that subsequent overwhelming victories by Abdallah Salih in Yemen in 1999 and 2006 respectively, advertised the regime and provided the lens through, which the regime enjoyed dominance over its opponents.<sup>24</sup>

This is without doubt, important findings, but it is not absolutely automatic that authoritarian regimes will always win elections within its jurisdiction. There are some studies, which found contradictory findings that elections by authoritarian may not necessarily keep it in power. Instead it can come on the heel of mounting internal pressure against the regime. Magaloni plainly points out in his work that the long serving authoritarian regime of Daniel Arap Moi under his dominant KANU party in Kenya lost election to the National Rainbow coalition (NARC).<sup>25</sup> It happened despite the fact that the government had access to all means that could affect election results in its favour. Therefore, it can be said that elections as a tool for a struggle for power, if not biased can provide opposition with an opportunity to market themselves through their alternative policy and government proposals to cause a change through ballot box.

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<sup>19</sup> Schedler, Andreas. "Elections without Democracy: The Menu of Manipulation". *Journal of Democracy* Vol.13, No. 2. 2002, (36-50).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Greene, F. Kenneth. *Why Dominant Parties Lose: Mexico's Democratisation in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2007, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Lewitsky, Steven and Way, A. Lucan. "Linkage versus Leverage: Rethinking the International Dimension of Regime Change". *Comparative Politics* Vol. 38 No. 4. 2006,(370-400).

<sup>24</sup> Brownlee, Jason. "Executive Elections in the Arab World: When and How Do They Matter"? *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 44, No.7. 2011, (807-828).

<sup>25</sup> Magaloni, Beatriz. *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and its Demise in Mexico*, 2006, 39.

The survey of the literature above reveals that there has been an increasing interest in the study of elections held by authoritarian regimes. And most of these studies maintain that authoritarian regimes are out ever to seize every opportunity, which can aid them to ensure that opposition is never given any chance to step in the area of the jurisdiction of political power. Other studies have credited elections in authoritarian regimes as a useful gate through which to remove an authoritarian regime from power. Such studies mainly put emphasis on the willingness of the authoritarian leader to relinquish power if defeated in an election and credibility of electoral institution. A noticeable limitation in these studies is that none seems to have explored the role of weak ties between the competitors in an election and electoral processes using election results. It is within this perspective this study attempts to examine the presidential elections in both Sudan and Egypt during the Omar Hassan al-Bashir and Hosni Mubarak's regimes respectively.

### **Theoretical Considerations for Analysis**

This study employs ideas built in institutional approach to develop an analytical framework to explain the role elections play in perpetuating the longevity of authoritarian regime. This approach has the potential to generate theoretical framework for explaining the effect of elections on authoritarian regime survival. According to Hall and Taylor, this approach considers the processes by which structures, rules and norms act as authoritative guidelines for social behaviour of stakeholders in elections.<sup>26</sup> From this perspective, an election is seen as an institution with established rules and procedure, which governs players in their actions. These authoritative guidelines are designed in such a way that they match with the values and expectations of the people. Thus, these rules and procedures are expected to influences and constrain electoral activities to reflect the will of the people. Thus, electoral process ought to give a neutral ground and take total autonomous control over the elections. In this way institutional approach examines how institutions can maintain political balance to reflect individual person's preferences.

Therefore, it is tenable to argue that any violation of the rules and procedures by any party is most likely to favour the party with much influence. Applying this insight, the theoretical explanations on elections in authoritarian regimes can be viewed in two perspectives based on the literature reviewed. The first perspective puts emphasis on elections as a route through

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<sup>26</sup>Hall, A.Peter and Taylor C.R. Rosemary. "Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms". *MPIFG Discussion Paper*, 1996.

which people can remove autocratic regime. It contends that when authoritarian regimes allow electoral process to take its course without much influence or manipulation of the rules and norms of the electoral game to affect the results in its favour, there is a possibility that opposition can win an election and subsequently, the regime will hand over power.<sup>27</sup>

The second perspective emphasises that an election is a super tool for an authoritarian regime to maximise its stay in power. The authoritarian regime does not allow a free and fair election even the verdict of the people is not in its favour. This study relies mainly on the arguments and explanations laid down by Gedes in her study, which falls in the second perspective.<sup>28</sup> In her study she suggests that there are authoritarian regimes which have used elections and political party institutions to buy the sympathy of both domestic and international communities to prove their worthiness. She insists that these regimes use coercive means and manipulate the weak institutions as reliable market through, which they comfortably prevail over anyone rising up to challenge the regime. It is within this line of thinking that the main mental conceptual argument built in the framework of analysis is derived. It demonstrates that an authoritarian regime enjoys monopoly over controlling the ways that may increase the opposition's ability to effectively engage in electoral processes by manipulating it to its own advantage at the expense of any challenger.

It is argued, the authoritarian regimes tactically and forcefully convince the people to remain submissive to the regime, by massively expressing the dangers they are likely to face if they vote for the opposition. In this way, the authoritarian designs the electoral system processes suitable to its interest. This, in most cases gives it a soft-line to victory in every successive election held and hence its survival.

Perhaps, it is argued too, that since the regime exercises super influence over electoral procedures, it continues to hold onto a sharp edged opportunities to survive successive elections with super victory without losing control of the steering wheel of government. In other words, poor elections in authoritarian regimes are conditioned by the regimes behaviour. Hence elections can be said to be a driving force for authoritarian regime continuity. Therefore, the analysis of the arguments advanced in this paper focuses on two assumptions; one is that, the ability of either of the players in the election game (authoritarian

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<sup>27</sup>Magaloni, Beatriz. *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and its Demise in Mexico*, 2006, 39.

<sup>28</sup>Gedes, Barbara. "Why Parties and Elections in Authoritarian Regimes?" Revised Version of a Paper Prepared for Presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American political Science Association, Washington DC, 2006.



regime and opposition) to win the elections will partly depend on the fairness and strength displayed by the electoral body in managing the election processes. Secondly, authoritarian regimes always desire a lot to stay in power by any means available to them. The theoretical implication of these assumptions is regime survival based on selfish interests.

### **An Overview of Election and Election System in Sudan and Egypt**

Election systems are means to manage and recruit political leaders through competing in election in a free and fair manner. However, if the underlying electoral conditions are not favourable to all stakeholders in the election processes, it is destined to undermine its purpose. Many states have their own choice of electoral system. In Sudan, the president is elected based on absolute majority vote through a two-round system.<sup>29</sup> That is if no candidate wins absolute majority, a second round runoff of election is held between two candidates who could have got first and second position in the first round.<sup>30</sup> Members of parliament (Majlis Watani) too are elected on the principle of popular votes for a 6 years term. Meanwhile the members of the state councils (Majlis Welayat) are elected by indirect vote to serve similar term like that of the members of parliament. Like in Sudan the president in Egypt is also elected by absolute majority and a two-round system to serve a 6 year term in office. Similarly, members of the advisory council (Majlis Al-Shura) too are elected on popular majority support for a period of 6 years term.<sup>31</sup> But there are other members of the Majlis Al-Shura who are appointed by the President to serve similar term of office.

### **Empirical Arguments for Authoritarian Regime Survival in Sudan and Egypt**

Comparing elections by Muslim countries' authoritarian regimes in general and Egypt and Sudan in particular can be water-tight when based on sound empirical basis. The empirical arguments presented in this study are essentially descriptive based on data obtained on subsequent presidential elections results in Sudan and Egypt contained in African Elections Database; elections in Africa: a data handbook and Inter-Parliamentary Parline database.<sup>32</sup> Other sources include election observers' reports in Sudan and Egypt. Much

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<sup>29</sup>Doebber, F.Curtis and Fleischhacker, Helga. "Sudan". In Nohlen, Dieter, Krennerich, Michael and Thibaut, Bernhard (Eds.). *Elections in Africa: A Data Handbook*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1999, 843.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 849.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>See, Ries, Matthias. "Egypt". In Nohlen, Dieter, Krennerich, Michael and Thibaut, Bernhard (Eds.). *Elections in Africa: A Data Handbook*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1999, 329-350; Doebber, F.Curtis and Fleischhacker, Helga. "Sudan". In Nohlen, Dieter, Krennerich, Michael and Thibaut, Bernhard (Eds.). *Elections*

attention is devoted to interpret how these election results define the survival of authoritarian regimes of Hosni Mubarak and Omar Hassan al-Bashir respectively.<sup>33</sup>In doing so the focus is to attempt to answer these questions as stated earlier. (i) Is there any linkage between elections and survival of authoritarian regime in power? (ii) What is Common about Authoritarian Regime Elections in Sudan and Egypt?

These two Muslim countries shared in common in the application of their authoritarian political system. In a bid to win both international and domestic acceptance, both countries allowed the different opposition groups to actively participate in national general periodic elections schedules as shown in Tables below. Shehata points out that the Egyptian political system experienced greater pluralisation by increasing political parties, Hosni Mubarak on the other hand made sure that he blocked any group that deemed a threat to his regime from gaining popular influence.<sup>34</sup> A close analysis of the elections reveals the nature of participation and processes, in some ways can define the survival of authoritarian regimes in these countries. The National Congress under the leadership of Omar Hassan al-Bashir and the National Democratic Party led by Hosni Mubarak in Sudan and Egypt respectively maintained a super win in election for a long period of time.

**Table1: Elections Results in Sudan**

<b>2010 Presidential Election</b>		
<b>Party and Candidate</b>	<b>Votes</b>	<b>%</b>
National Congress Party- Omar Hassan al-Bashir	6,901694	68.24
Sudan Liberation Movement- Yasir Arman	2193826	21.69
Popular Congress Party- Abdullah Deng Nhial	396139	3.92
Democratic Unionist Party- Hatim Al-Sir	195668	1.92
Umma Party-Al-Sadiq Al-Mahdi	96868	0.96
Independent- Mahmood Ahmed Jeha	77132	0.76
Umma Reform and Renewal Party-	49402	0.71
New National Democratic Party-Munir Sheikh El- din Jallab	40277	0.49
Sudanese National Alliance- Abdel-Aziz Khalid	34,592	0.34
Sudanese Socialist Democratic Union- Fatima Abdel-Mahmood	30592	0.30

*in Africa: A Data Handbook*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1999, 843-862; African Election Database ([www.africanelections.tripod.com/index.html](http://www.africanelections.tripod.com/index.html)) accessed on 7/10/2011 and Inter-parliamentary Union ([www.ipu.org.parline/reports/2097\\_E.htm](http://www.ipu.org.parline/reports/2097_E.htm))

<sup>33</sup> See, European Parliament Delegation Observation to the General Election in Sudan Report by Ana Gomes. 2010.

<sup>34</sup>Shehata, Dina. *Islamists and Secularists in Egypt: Opposition, Conflict and Cooperation*. London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. 2010, 33.

Sudanese Community Party- Mohamed Ibrahim Nugud	26442	0.26
Total Votes	10,114310	100
<b>2000 Presidential Elections</b>		
National Congress Party (NCP)- Omar Hassan al-Bashir		86.5
APWF-Jafaar Nimeri		9.6
Malik Hussain		1.6
LD- Al Samuel Hussein Osman Mansour		1.3
Mahmood Ahmed Juma		1.0
<b>1996 Presidential Elections</b>		
Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir	4181784	75.68
Others	133032	24.32

**Source:** African Elections Database: <http://Africanelections.tripod.com/sd.html>

**Table 2: Elections Results in Egypt**

Party and Candidate and Candidate	Vote	%
National Democratic Party-Hosni Mubarak	6,316714	88.6
Al-Ghad- Ayman Nour	540405	7.3
Others	201891	2.6
	-	0.9
Total	7059010	
<b>Elections under Single Candidate</b>		
<b>Year of Election</b>	<b>For Hosni Mubarak</b>	<b>Against</b>
1999 Presidential Elections	93.79	6.2
1993 Presidential Elections	96.28	3.7
1987 Presidential Elections	97.12	2.9
1981 Presidential Elections	98.46	1.5

**Source:** Ries, Matthias.(1999).

The election results from both Egypt and Sudan reveal that leaders in these countries (Hosni Mubarak and Omar Hassan al-Bashir) adopted elections to sustain their regime for a long time. The study also showed that these leaders supported political pluralism and held multi-party elections, which gave oppositions to field candidates to challenge the incumbent. But interesting to note is that both authoritarian regimes of Sudan and Egypt, all have at one time been dominated by one party. This finding is in uniformity with the earlier research findings on authoritarian elections in countries like Malaysia, Zimbabwe, Senegal, Taiwan, Singapore, Mexico and Paraguay, which stressed that authoritarian leaders in these countries were able to renew their stay in power for a long time through regular multiparty elections.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> See, Greene, F. Kenneth. "The Political Economy of Authoritarian Single-Party Dominance". *Comparative Studies Vol., No. 7.* 2010,(807-834); The Southeast Asia Research Centre (SEARC). "Transition from Single-Party Dominance? New Data from Malaysia". Working Paper Series No. 103, November, 2009; Magaloni,

Findings from the current study indicate that, largely the trend of elections in these two Muslim countries demonstrates that leaders have appropriated the concept of popular elections to mobilise mass support in the contest for power. More interesting, based on the data obtained, these election results indicate a striking gap between votes obtained by the opposition combined to be far below than one would think compared to the percentage got by the incumbent. The data shows that the latest election in Sudan was in 2010, the incumbent garnered 68.24 per cent, while the opposition combined got 31.76 per cent. In Egypt the latest election was held in 2005, Hosni Mubarak obtained 88.6 per cent and the remaining 11.4 was shared among the opposition. In other two elections held in Sudan in 1996 and 2000 respectively, Omar Hassan al-Bashir won by 75.68 and 86.5 per cent respectively. It can be seen from these result that al-Bashir registered an increase in support by 10.82 per cent. Meanwhile, the opposition together obtained 24.32 and 13.5 per cent respectively. This showed decline in the performance of the opposition.

On the other hand, the interesting fact however, is that in Egypt, the four elections held in 1981, 1987, 1993 and 1999, the incumbent (Hosni Mubarak) won by well over 90 per cent. Looking at the overall level of party participation in the elections as indicated in Table 1 and Table 2 respectively, in Sudan it is rather impressive compared to Egypt. In Egypt, for the period 1981-1999 as shown in Table 2, all these presidential elections did not offer a choice. But had only one presidential candidate (Hosni Mubarak) competing against himself. In other words, the electorates were given no choice of any other candidates but rather were told to either vote for Hosni Mubarak or against. This can pre-empt one to argue that these were in any way not competitive elections since electorates had no alternative choice of candidates to compare Hosni Mubarak with. According to Abdu Rashid Moten and Islam, elections should give “a feeling of choice to electorates” so that the authority of government over the people is enhanced when elected into power.<sup>36</sup> This may force one to conclude that Hosni Mubarak’s successive majority votes win as shown in the Table are of questionable validity because he was competing with no candidates. This always made him to get majority votes on his side, to blindfold the masses and make another bid and get it. But interestingly despite marginalisation of certain sectors of the population, in every subsequent election the marginalised with limited power participated and this was later to provide impetus for a

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Beatriz. Elections Under Autocracy and the Strategic Game of Fraud. 2007. ([www.stevendroper.com/magaloni.pdf](http://www.stevendroper.com/magaloni.pdf) (accessed on 29/9/2011).

<sup>36</sup>Moten, A.R & Islam, S.S. *Introduction to Political Science, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, 327.

change in Egypt. In this context, Walis points out that in Sudan this could be due to the fact most of the candidates challenging the incumbent were unknown to people, while others were sourced and financed by the regime itself.<sup>37</sup> This suggests that elections held by authoritarian regimes remains a central issue, which serve as a stumbling block to the challengers of the regime to mount adequate formidable force to change the authoritarian regime.

Also, holding periodic elections by authoritarian regime seem to provide the regime with tactical plan to twist them to win the electorates votes. For example, monopoly over use of mass media for political campaign activities to gather sufficient support in order to win super vote results seems eminent in authoritarian regime. Data gathered on subsequent elections in Sudan and Egypt shows that authoritarian regimes have been working hard to win super majority votes. For instance, Shehata argues that Hosni Mubarak during the 2005 presidential election used excessive campaign to limit escalation of influence of the opposition.<sup>38</sup> Besides limiting the opposition influence through massive campaign, she further points out that Hosni Mubarak's authoritarian regime fuelled fragmentation and divisionism within the different opposition political parties.<sup>39</sup> These sentiments concur with findings of Levitsky and Way who argue that authoritarian incumbents "make systematic use of the state's infrastructure such as buildings, vehicles, communications equipment and personnel for their electoral campaigns."<sup>40</sup> This proposes that authoritarian leaders use their position of having access to power and public funds, to spend substantial amount of time, resources and effort to extend private generosity to groups of people and individuals whose loyalty and support they need. In this way, they ensure they bias election to confirm their victory. This limits the chances of the opposition to mobilise sufficient supporters to cast their votes for them. This is worsened by lack of cooperation among the opposition to field single candidate to run against the authoritarian regime candidate.

Besides, this can further be explained by the fact all through their regimes both al-Bashir and Mubarak maintained high numbers of seats in the national assembly. Table 3 and Table 4 below provide an insight into the seats occupied by the authoritarian regime.

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<sup>37</sup>Willis, Justin & al-Battahani, Atta. "We Changed the Laws": Electoral Practice and Malpractice in Sudan since 1953" *African Affairs*, Vol. 109, No. 435. 2010, (191-212).

<sup>38</sup>Shehata, Dina. *Islamists and Secularists in Egypt: Opposition, Conflict and Cooperation*, 34.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Lewitsky, Steven and Way, A. Lucan. "Linkage versus Leverage: Rethinking the International Dimension of Regime Change", 2006, (370-400).

**Table 3: Parliamentary Elections in Egypt**

	1984	1987	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010
Political Groups	Total Seats (448)	Total Seats (448)	Total Seats (454)	Total Seats (454)	Total seats (450)	Total Seats (454)	Total Seats 512
National Democratic Party (NDP)	391	359	386 (78.4%)	318 (71.6%)	353	320	427
NPUP	0	-	5 (1.4%)	5 (1.1%)	-	-	-
Liberal Socialist Party (LSP)	4	-	-	1 (0.2%)	-	-	-
Social Labour Party (SLP)	4	-	-	1	-	-	0
NWP alliance	58 (12.7%)	-	-	-	-	-	-
News Wafd Party (NWP)	-	34	0	6 (1.4%)	7	6	7
Islamic Alliance	-	57	-	-	-	-	-
Ummah Party (UP)	-	-	0	0	-	-	-
Independents	-	8	57 (18.7%)	112 (25.5%)	72	26	69
Green Party (GP)	-	-	0	0	-	-	-
Egypt Arab Socialist Party (EASP)	-	-	0	0	-	-	-
Democratic Union Party (DUP)	-	-	0	0	-	-	-
Arab Democratic Nasserist Party (ADNP)	-	-	-	0	-	-	-
Populist Democratic Party (PDP)	-	-	-	1(0.2%)	-	-	-
Misr al-Fatah Party (MFP)	-	-	0	0	-	-	-
Solidarity Party (SP)	-	-	-	0	-	-	-
Social Justice Party (SJP)	-	-	-	0	-	-	1
National Progressive Unionist Grouping (Tagammu)	-	-	-	5	-	-	5
Democratic Peace Party (DPP)		-	-		-	-	1
Tomorrow Party (TM)		-	-		-	2	1
Jil (Generation)			-		-		1
National Front for Change (NFC)	-	-	-	-	-	8	
Muslim Brotherhood (MB)	-	-	-	-	-	88	

Coalition Party		-	-		6		
Nasserite Party		-	-	1	3		
Others		-	-		1		

Source: Inter-parliamentary Union ([www.ipu.org.parline/reports/2097\\_E.htm](http://www.ipu.org.parline/reports/2097_E.htm))

**Table 4: Parliamentary Elections in Sudan (1989-2010)**

	1996	2000	2005	2010
Political Groups	A total of 300 members were appointed by the president to serve as national assembly	Total Seats (360)	Total Seats	Total Seats (450)
National Congress Party (NCP)		355	234 (52%)	323
Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)			126 (28%)	99
Other Northern Parties			63 (14%)	
Other Southern Political Group			27(6%)	
People's Congress (PC)				4
Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)				4
Federal Umma Party (FUP)				3
Umma Party for Reform and Development (UPRD)				2
Democratic Unionist Party-Origin (DUP-O )				2
Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)-DC				2
Umma Collective Party (UCL)				1
National Umma Party (NUP)				1
Umma Party (UP)				1
Muslim Brotherhood (MB)				1
Independents		5		3
Vacant				4

Source: Inter-parliamentary Union ([www.ipu.org.parline/reports/2097\\_E.htm](http://www.ipu.org.parline/reports/2097_E.htm))

It is evident from both tables that both regimes enjoyed dominance and power of numbers in the national assembly. This could possibly explain that these regimes could enact laws and policies to guarantee their stay in power.

That said, however, changes in both countries took different dimensions for the opposition to gain onto the nerves of authoritarian regimes substantially in the respective countries. In fact, it is difficult to imagine with such big percentage of election win as indicated in Table 1 and 2 above that there could be any open threat to the regime. But the regimes in both countries continued to receive multiple resistances from pockets of the opposition. In Sudan, owing to the multiple persistent crises stage-managed by Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM) using its military arm, the Sudan Liberation Army (SPLA) under the leadership of Garang against Khartoum government led by Omar Hassan al-Bashir's authoritarian regime, was able to loosen a little to let in the opposition to share power to ease tension and pressure from both local and international communities. In this way, the regime saw it wise to elect him as Vice President to the regime. This partially eased the social and political tension against the government by the main challenger, the Sudan People Liberation Movement (SPLM). This helped to further extend time for the survival of the regime. But it did not eliminate SPLM's spirit to have a real test of political power. When John Garang died in a helicopter crash while returning from Uganda, the successor took onto himself the legacy of his predecessor to keep the Khartoum government on constant pressure to abandon authoritarianism but with little success. Therefore, it is argued that due to the failure of the SPLM to effectively change the authoritarian regime, they opted for demanding autonomy from the Khartoum government to create an independent state of South Sudan.

But Sudan opted for a non-official partisan election. Omar Hassan al-Bashir in the 1996 allowed other candidates to compete with him in election as shown in Table 1 but all as independents. It is perhaps clear to sum up this argument as the data in Table 1 and Table 2 reveals that the common feature worth noting in the elections in both countries is that, there are overwhelming super majority votes won by authoritarian regime to remain in power; while that obtained by the opposition challengers put together, was typically far less a fraction of the percentage got by the incumbent authoritarian regime. This trend of election results in both countries remained unchanged throughout in every subsequent election held for decades. The most important point to note here is that authoritarian leaders in both Sudan and Egypt understood the role of threat from opposition in protecting their government from collapsing in the eyes of opposition. This immensely contributed to the division of votes among the oppositions and this strengthened their inability to provide a common selling



political candidate and programme to win popular support.<sup>41</sup> This way, in both countries leadership in power built concrete wall to protect their position and block opposition from gaining any access to state power. But they credibly succeeded in expressing their dissatisfaction against the regime by marginally sharing votes with the regime as the election results reveals and keeping itself politically alive.

In Egypt, mounting pressure continued to rise from agitators for change, which reached its climax in 2011 forcing the long serving authoritarian regime of Hosni Mubarak to step aside to pave way for the formation of a new interim government after gradual constitutional reforms he endorsed to effect changes in the Egyptian political system. The tide of dissatisfaction reached levels beyond just the opposition, doing what they are known for, that is participating and losing elections, to people rising up in massive numbers on the streets to say “enough is enough” for the authoritarian regime of Hosni Mubarak. This upheaval of the masses taking to the streets has not left Hosni Mubarak as a free former head of state but as a man with many cases to answer in courts of law. It could be difficult to believe that once always a super winner of elections (Hosni Mubarak) in Egypt well over 90 per cent could be strained by mere protest .It is argued that continuous participation in elections by the opposition, could have empowered these them and brought them closer to the mainstream realities of politics. Authorities like Geddes voice-fully puts it that elections are such a risky investment to authoritarian regimes because they have the potential of mobilising the latent opposition existing.<sup>42</sup>It can keep the opposition busy hatching strategies of having their influence and presence felt among the citizens, to win their support to do what is unthinkable by the regime. This partly explains why Hosni Mubarak’s long internal political cohesion he established was tested beyond his imaginations.

### **Challenges that Face Authoritarian Elections**

In each of these Muslim countries Sudan and Egypt, weak electoral institution and double standards by the authoritarian regimes can be pointed out as eminent issues, which have worked against potential opposition from winning elections. These, and other challenges, are emphasised in many cases to have significantly worked as a mechanism in reproducing these

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<sup>41</sup> Willis,Justin and al-Battahani, Atta. “We Changed the Laws”: Electoral Practice and Malpractice in Sudan since 1953” *African Affairs*, Vol. 109, No. 435. 2010, (191-212).

<sup>42</sup>Geddes, Barbara. “Why Parties and Elections in Authoritarian Regimes?”

regimes.<sup>43</sup> This view corroborates with that of Abaza who observed that elections held by authoritarian regimes were just a tool of change of style of authoritarian continuity rather than giving people opportunity to exercise their civil liberty and bringing substantive change for transfer of power in Egypt.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, holding elections by authoritarian regimes may not necessarily mean executing democratic governance. It could be held to enhance the roots of stability for the incumbent authoritarian regime because “autocrats are interested in their own survival”.<sup>45</sup> The most discounting feeling about these elections is that have been acknowledged with mixed observations and reactions, particularly for being questionable. Widespread perception contained in reports such as International Election Watchdog (Observers) such as Amnesty International, election watch and Humana Rights maintained that both Sudan and Egypt with varying degrees used fraud and coercion to stay in power.<sup>46</sup> In this way, “electoral processes remained at risk on a multiple fronts including the ability of candidates to campaign freely and the impact of delayed logistical preparations by National Election Commission (NEC).<sup>47</sup> These views of the observers supports argument that authoritarian regimes allow political parties to participate in election but “they do so under plenty unfair conditions such as creating a situation where citizens develop the view of supporting incumbent in return to personal enrichment; electoral body serve as a tool for the ruling party to exclude and prevent opposition from accessing fair electoral process; and incomplete voter register lists, voting materials, vote rigging, fraud and intimidation among others characterise the electoral process”.<sup>48</sup> An election conducted under such condition cannot reflect the will of people, since there is no level playing field. The electoral environment favours authoritarian regime to use of undemocratic practices and abuse of incumbency in the electoral process. In this regard, Abd al-Ghaffar argues that Egypt’s electoral regulations and system failing to provided a level ground were the biggest stumbling block to a free and fair election in that country.<sup>49</sup> This suggests that election gives authoritarian government fertile ground to intimidate challengers as they can easily implicate

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<sup>43</sup>Lindberg, I. Staffan. “A Theory of Elections as a Mode of Transistion”. In Linderber, I. Staffan (Ed.) *Democratization by Elections: A New Mode of Transition*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 2009, 328.

<sup>44</sup>Abaza, Khairi. *Political Islam and Regime Survival in Egypt*. Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near Policy. 2006, 9.

<sup>45</sup>Magaloni, Beatriz and Kricheli, Ruth. “Political Order and One-Party Rule”. *The Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 13, No.1. 2009, (23-43)

<sup>46</sup>European Parliament Delegation Observation to the General Election in Sudan Report by Ana Gomes. 2010.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Rakner, Lise and Ronning, Helge. Do Elections imply Democracy or Autocracy?: Election Processes, Liberation Movements and Democratic Change in Africa”. *CMI Brief Vol 9 No.2*. 2010.

<sup>49</sup> Abd al-Ghaffar Shukor. “Political Parties in Egypt”. 2005, 48.

for being detractive to election processes. But other election observers such as African Union and Arab League were of the view that elections were credible.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, in Sudan there are strong supporting evidences indicating that elections have not been free of irregularities. Human rights Watch plainly states:

“Violation of civil and political rights by Sudan security forces throughout the country seriously undermined prospects for credible elections ... in northern Sudan, security forces arbitrarily arrested members and election observers in areas such as south Darfur and Khartoum of opposition political parties and activists. The Khartoum government used excessive forces to suppress peaceful assembly and prevented free association and expression and, in Aweil, Northern Bahr el Ghazal harassed and arrested Tong Lual Ayat, the leader of Democratic Party. Also, Police and other national security forces violently arrested 160 including political leaders and journalists, injured more than 40 and dispersed massive peaceful demonstration in Khartoum and many other towns using tear gas, rubber bullets, batons and other weapons”.<sup>51</sup>

In fact, it is clear that systematic prioritisation of use of election repression was evident. With such situation it is difficult for elections in authoritarian regimes to meet minimum conditions necessary for free and fair competitive elections. There are high possibilities that election under such circumstances where opposition are kept under all sorts of harassment, intimidation and detention electoral process will always produce biased results. Since the opposition may not be in position to adequately counter the bias against them; and they are not in position to adequately extend private assistance to people in need to build enough public following loyalty and support the political leaders are looking for in elections. It is argued people see it more profitable and less costly to privately negotiate with, or seek assistance from those in authoritarian government rather than organise resistance openly against the state. In this way, authoritarian leaders who are in custody of power and those subject to power are in a relationship, where there authoritarian regime confers benefits to people, which they are urgently in need. These are given through impersonal application of public institutions such as electoral systematic vote buying and bribery. The beneficiaries of such favours from authoritarian leaders heap praises on the regime. Interesting to note too, in such circumstances there is always a feeling of mistrust expressed towards rival members as being dangerous to the government. It is this kind of relationship that authoritarian leaders are

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<sup>50</sup> See, Human Rights Watch Report. Sudan: Abuses Undermine Impending Elections ; European Parliament Delegation Observation to the General Election in Sudan Report by Ana Gomes. 2010.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

able to secure groups of people or individuals' compliance with practices that are unlawful. This is also a powerful strategy authoritarians use to fragment the opposition.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the arguments raised above, it can be concluded that authoritarian regimes in Sudan and Egypt have largely allowed holding elections to purchase loyalty as part of a strategy to stay in power. On the surface, there is a combination of similar mechanisms which allowed both cases of authoritarian regimes studied to win successive elections to survive in power. These among others include the desire to retain power by the authoritarian regime and the urge to buy both local and international legitimacy that seem to be compelling these Muslim countries to sanction for elections. And periodic multiparty elections seem to be more safe and reliable way for authoritarian regimes to survive in power. They have served as ingredient to authoritarian regimes in both Egypt and Sudan. They have shown cosmetic popularity of these regimes based on election results. To say the least elections have been used as a mask to ensure that authoritarian regimes are tolerated by both internal and international communities. And worth noting is that elections for decades have worked as breeding ground for stabilising authoritarian regimes in power in Sudan and Egypt on the ground that those recruited to serve the regime look at it as a patronage; they are ever ready to do even whatever is beyond their means to protect the regime in power so that they can continue benefiting from their positions. Weakening of opposition through extensive use of electoral repression features is visible in the authoritarian behaviour. This, in a way reduces the possibility of any attempt to challenge the authoritarian regime. Furthermore, these elections also are instrumental in identifying the potential and strength of opposition. And this helps the authoritarian government to design appropriate mechanisms to deal with them accordingly in order to win an election with a big margin. What should also be mentioned is that election bodies that are ought to be most useful, in playing a neutral position and providing fertile ground to both parties in electoral competition, at times enjoys greater and strong ties with the government than any other stakeholder in the electoral process. This kills its autonomy. Hence, usually results of every election held are received with rejection as the playing field is claimed to be hostile to opposition.

In that regard, perhaps, many would think that elections in authoritarian regimes are useless because they are vehicles that help to further authoritarian regime duration. But it is not

always so because electoral exposure to citizens in autocratic states socialises people into political activism. For instance, elections kept the opposition alive in Egypt, to renew their ideas among the people during election campaigns. This amounted to exposing the unpopularity of the regime, which facilitated the growth of mass support to effect change, through mass protest. In this way, Hosni Mubarak's long surviving authoritarian regime was brought down. Despite the fact that Hosni Mubarak's authoritarian regime had multiple strategies to deter the oppositions from accessing government power. Therefore, elections should be encouraged and maintained in authoritarian regimes, for the important role it plays, which among others is giving opposition a ground to mount pressure on the authoritarian regime to cause reform in the country.

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